

BALAD downtime

story and photos by
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Heat and choking dust. Long hours and family separation. Mortar attacks and the stress of war. These are just a part of life for Airmen at Balad Air Base, Iraq.

Life there is not easy to say the least. So when they get the downtime, Airmen find — sometimes make up — things to take the edge off the routine. To chill out. Or to reflect on the important job they are doing in the global war on terrorism and keeping Iraq free.

Reading or working out is big in the tent city the troops call home. So is basketball, and sending e-mails to loved ones. Some troops catch a ballgame or movie on television. Of course there are the card games and shooting pool — or the breeze. Some gather to put on an impromptu guitar concert, even taking requests. And there are some who just prefer to pick a quiet, shady spot to grab a break, or a snooze.

Airmen will find something to do when they're off duty. Because with each passing hour, they're that much closer to joining the loved ones they left at home. ♀

Any quiet moment is golden at Balad Air Base, Iraq. This Airman reads a newspaper to catch up on current events back home.



The little things are what make life at Balad more bearable. A sign (top left) reminds Airmen that they've come from every corner of the globe to keep Iraq free. While waiting to go outside the wire on a combat patrol, Airmen (above) find time to strike up an impromptu game of hacky sack. Not graffiti, but unit markings (left) adorn the T-barriers that protect one of the base's dining facilities.



Keeping fit is a big thing at Balad.

Airmen take to the gym (above) to get in a quick workout. With the sun near the horizon, an Airman (top right) takes a break outside his barracks. With guitars in hand, two Airmen (middle right) play an impromptu jam session for some of their buddies. After dark, when the heat is bearable, Airmen play a game of basketball (right) before hitting the sack.